DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 090 730 EC 061 772

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TITLE	Gifted Children as Tutors of Educable Mental Retardates. Mental Retardation Training Program Technical Report Series 68-1.
INSTITUTION	Ohio State Univ., Columbus.
PUB DATE	Jul 68
NOTE	18p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Mental Retardation Training Program, 9 West Buttles Avenue, Columbus, Ohio 43215
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS	*Educable Mentally Handicapped; Elementary School Students; *Exceptional Child Research; *Gifted; Mentally Handicapped; Peer Relationship; *Student Attitudes; *Tutoring

ABSTRACT

Nine gifted fifth grade students received a 2-week training program, tutored 36 educable mentally retarded (EMR) first grade students for 12 weeks, and later gave responses on an attitude scale (as did 15 gifted nonparticipating controls). During training the experimental Ss were taught to use materials such as readiness books and a flannel board, were shown pictures and studies of retarded children, and were acquainted with the kind of behavior to expect from their students. The Ss made lesson plans according to a summary of each first grade child's need for aid with basic number facts, reading level skills, and art skills, and also developed progress reports. Each Ss tutored three tutees 45 minutes twice weekly. Questionnaire items such as "should retarded children be in school?" and "Would you invite a retarded child to your birthday party?" elicited the following attitudes: experimental Ss were more accepting of EMR students in a school situation, and were more willing to accept the ERM child in their homes (but hesitant to have an EMR child eat with the family) than controls; and neither experimental nor control Ss fully understood the concept of retardation although the experimental Ss had a greater understanding. A year after the study the gifted tutors contiued to work with the EMR students. (MC)

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The Mental Retardation Training Program, a joint project of the College of Administrative Science, College of Social & Behavioral Sciences, College of Education, and College of Medicine, is committed to the alleviation of the manpower shortage in the field of mental retardation. To this end, it provides an interdisciplinary arena for research and training through the mechanism of service to the retarded.

HISTORY

The impetus for the Training Program began with the Report of the President's Panel on Mental Retardation in 1962, and culminated in the enactment by the 88th. Congress of a series of three pieces of legislation to stimulate research, training and service facilities for mental retardation. In 1965, the report of the Citizen's Committee to the Governor of Ohio specifically stressed the need for manpower training in University-Affiliated Facilities for the Mentally Retarded.

GOALS

The broad objectives of the Training Program are:

- to develop an interdisciplinary approach to mental retardation research;
- to provide interdisciplinary instruction in mental retardation;
- to disseminate information related to mental retardation;
- to develop and promote methods of prevention of mental retardation;
- to expand scientific knowledge in the diagnosis and treatment of the retarded;
- to extend the breadth and depth of both student involvement in the community and in-service instruction for professionals.

ORGANIZATION

To serve its complex objectives, the Training Program has a Policy Council consisting of the Deans of the participating Colleges; a Program Advisory Committee consisting of faculty representatives of many generic disciplines; a Liaison Advisory Committee consisting of representatives of state and community agencies; an administrative triad (listed below); and three Program Coordinators through whom the academic departments relate in order to achieve the stated program objectives.

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THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

MENTAL RETARDATION TRAINING PROGRAM

Technical Report Series

68-1

GIFTED CHILDREN AS TUTORS OF EDUCABLE MENTAL RETARDATES

by

Valerie A. Warner
College of Education

July, 1968

EC 061772

Technical Report Series
of
The Ohio State University Mental Retardation Training Program

The Ohio State University Mental Retardation Training Program is an all-University program devoted to instruction, research, and service in problems of mental retardation. Among full time and cooperating staff in university departments are representatives of:

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Gifted Children as Tutors of Educable Mental Retardates

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The educable mental retardate (EMR) in a special class is a secluded member of a school. There is a lack of contact in most schools between the EMR child and the child in a regular class. Special education classes in many elementary, junior and senior high schools are self-contained. Some exceptions are home economics, shop and physical education. But even if the children do have a different teacher, they are very seldom placed in a home economics class with regular class children. The regular class student has little contact with the special education student. His ideas of and attitudes about these students are not based on first hand knowledge of these children, but on rumors, prejudices, and limited observation, only in passing in the halls.

The purpose of this paper is to describe a project in which fifth grade accelerated students in an enrichment program tutored first grade candidates for a special education class (EMR's). The idea for the program was taken from the teen-tutorial program

which takes superior high school students to work with culturally deprived elementary students. This program was discussed in a teacher's meeting and a suggestion was made to make use of the gifted children to tutor retardates who had not been placed in a special education classroom due to lack of room. The expectation was held that the gifted children would gain experience in an authority role and that the first grade teachers could use the students to do supervised individual work with the retarded children which they found difficult to do in the large first grade classrooms.

All the tutors went through a training period for two weeks before taking the children and continued training throughout the time they worked with the MR children. At the end of the project the nine children who served as tutors (experimental) and fifteen other children of similar ability who did not participate (controls) completed an attitude questionnaire. Because of the small number of subjects, and the small number of items in some of the attitudinal subtests, differences in responses of experimental and control subjects were treated qualitatively. Thirty-six retarded children served as tutees.

Procedures

The fifth grade gifted children in an enrichment class were to tutor the first grade candidates for special education in reading

and mathematics as well as read stories to them and work with various art materials. Several weeks before beginning to teach the MR children, the gifted class was taught to use Frostig materials, readiness books, the use of a flannel board with sets and arrays, and the making of simple dittos. They also selected educational books as well as those to be read for pleasure. The students who worked with the EMR children were given a two-week orientation program on mental retardation. They were shown pictures and studies of children who were retarded, and how programs were set up to enable them to work to their fullest potential (the pictures and studies were from the district's special education program). They were also taught the classification of mental retardation, and the kind of behavior to expect from their students. Their two week training program then consisted of both study of the nature of mental retardation, and methods for teaching the retarded children.

The retarded children had presented a behavior problem in their regular classroom. When they were broken up in small groups with gifted children, doing work at their own level, they presented very few behavior problems. The program was set up twice a week for 45 minutes to one hour per session for twelve weeks.

The first day the students met with the EMRs' teachers for a summary of each child's work to the present and suggestions for where and with what to start each child. Included in the summary were the child's knowledge of basic number facts, the primer used and the child's reading level and samples of art work. The children then were required to make lesson plans to show the EMRs' teachers as well as progress reports on each child. They reported to the teacher each time they worked with the children.

As the children became better acquainted with one another, they began to bring in things to share -- crayons, a piece of candy or a pencil. The first graders were very excited by these "rewards." The children seemed to enjoy each other's company and that of the retardates. There was not one of the gifted children who did not want to participate or who dropped out of the program after it had once started. The tutors seemed to enjoy their planning and authority role. Some of their informal comments included such statements as: "Now I know the work teachers have to do to teach just one lesson." and "It makes me mad when they talk out of turn and interrupt just when I want them to listen most." Interestingly, their awareness of teacher problems was carried into their regular classrooms: according to teacher reports, the participants

showed more identification with their teachers and the teaching process and, because of their perceptions of the difficulties involved in teaching, were more prone to request their own class mates' cooperation with the teacher.

The gifted children had two or three students to tutor. To reduce noise and to have more board space, they were divided into two adjoining classrooms. The enrichment teacher wandered between the classrooms checking on the groups. The first graders were required to bring pencil, paper and crayons to each class. They were also required to show their graded work to their own teacher.

Attitudes and Attitude Change

An attitude scale (comprising 25 items and eliciting yes-no answers) was administered to experimental and control subjects. Individual items were classified into one of the following subgroups: (1) school relationships; (2) home relationships; (3) personal relationships; (4) retardate feelings; (5) understanding of mental retardation and (6) willingness to provide assistance to the retardate. As is apparent cognitive, affective and action tendency items were included in the subtests. However, because of the small number of items within each subgroup, no attempts were

made to study interrelationships among the components. Representative questionnaire items included the following:

1. Do you think retarded children should be in school?
2. Would you invite a retarded child to your birthday party?
3. Would you stand up for a retarded child if someone were making fun of him?

A brief discussion of differences in response of experimental and control subjects is given below for each attitudinal subgroup. Because of the small numbers of subjects involved in these analyses the data are treated descriptively: no statistical tests of differences in responses between experimental and control subjects were undertaken.

School Relationships

The experimental group was more accepting of the EMR in a school situation than were control subjects. Both groups of children added the category "maybe" to the scale. In addition, when personally interviewed, they frequently qualified their answers on the basis of liking or disliking the child as a person: if they liked the child they would relate to him -- if not, he would be avoided.

Home Relationships

The experimental group was much more willing to accept the retarded child in their homes, but were hesitant to have a retarded child eat with their families. Only one of the control group would have a retarded child over for dinner. When interviewed they were more concerned over how their mothers and fathers would react than with the reactions of the retarded child. The experimental group expressed the view that they would talk to their parents about the child before they brought them for dinner. Persons in both groups expressed the view that they would want to help their brother or sister learn as much as they could if the sibling were retarded. Subjects in the experimental group were more likely to understand that the retarded children work slower and indicated that they would spend more time working with them.

Personal Feelings

It was surprising that in both groups seven respondents indicated that they would be friends with a retarded child, but only five in the control group would play with them. This apparent contradiction of responses was explored in individual interviews. The majority of those responding indicated that a friend could be just someone you say "Hi" to in the hall but "you don't necessarily

have to play with them." The relationships between the non-participants and the retardates then were likely to be more casual than was reported by participants.

Retardate Feelings

Neither the experimental group nor the control group thought retarded were as happy or could have as much fun as they could have. Although the gifted children never stated that they equated happiness and intelligence, this is the impression that the interviewer received when interviewing the children. They repeatedly stated that the retardate wouldn't understand or wasn't smart enough to play their games and enjoy the things they enjoy. Neither control nor experimental subjects mentioned individual differences among retardates. No respondents reflected upon the consideration that what makes one child happy will not necessarily bring happiness to another child. They seemed to feel that the retardates' activities were too simple to be rewarding.

Understanding of Mental Retardation

Neither experimental or control subjects fully understood the concept of retardation, but the experimental group had a greater understanding. In the open ended question "What is a mentally

retarded child like?", the experimental group were much better informed, suggesting that the orientation sessions and/or contact had actually increased the participants' knowledge about retardate capacities and capabilities. Control subjects tended to equate mental retardation with physical handicap. Only three control subjects believed that the retardates would be able to play softball.

Willingness to Provide Assistance to the Retarded

The control subjects did not particularly want to help the mentally retarded child in a tutoring situation: two of the subjects said no on paper, but yes verbally. They finally qualified their answers with maybe. They stated that it would depend on the situation and whether their regular class teachers would approve of them helping the special class after their work was finished. In general, the experimental group was more accepting of the mentally retarded children after their experience than were the controls who had no direct contact or experience with the retardates. The findings are reminiscent of a recent study by Jaffee (1966) who observed that: "negative attitudes were elicited by the label 'mentally retarded' in comparison to that of the sketch person described as being retarded. Subjects apparently reacted negatively to a stereotyping label but not to a person who was described as retarded but functioned adequately."

As Jaffee stated, the negative responses of the children may well come just from the labeling of the questions. They are very unfamiliar with mentally retarded children except to know there is a special education class in their building and to know that the kids in that class are "dumb". It would be interesting to do a similar study eliminating negative terminology.

Jaffee goes on to state "contact with the retarded may change the more cognitive or descriptive dimension of attitudes but not feelings or hypothetic social acceptance." This may be one of the reasons the experimental group was more understanding personally of the children, but was not necessarily as accepting of the retardate in a family or group situation.

Follow up

A year after the study was undertaken the gifted children continued to go into the special classes to help with both school work and with other activities. The tutors had also organized a group to teach playground games, so that the retardates would be able to join in more recess activities and be better accepted by their non retarded peers. Overall, no special problems were uncovered in this long term follow up.

Summary:

This paper describes a program in which special class gifted children having WISC I.Q. s of 130 and higher tutored educable mentally retarded students. The project lasted for twelve weeks; the tutoring sessions 45 minutes to one hour twice a week.

The tutoring activity was seen as a valuable learning experience for the participants and there is evidence to indicate that, contrasted with their absence, direct contact and experience do lead to increased acceptance and understanding of the educable mentally retarded. However, even with the two week training provided before working with the retardates, the gifted children still did not completely grasp the concept of mental retardation. Nevertheless, the participants came out of the experience with a great desire to continue their work with the retardates and with positive attitudes toward their tutees.

The study uncovered no data which would preclude having the bright students work with the mentally retarded under structured programs embodying the principles discussed in this paper.

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